

BOOK OF EZRA
CONFESSION AND CLEANSING
EZRA 9:1-15; 10:1-44

Introduction

We saw as we ended last week how that no sooner had this man of the Word, Ezra, arrived than the Word began to reveal sin!

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Ezra discovered that the Jews had mingled with their heathen neighbors and married heathen wives. (Cf. *Deuteronomy 7, Exodus 19:5-6, Psalm 106:35*)

Ezra was so burdened at hearing this report that he publicly tore his garment and mantle in sorrow and repentance, plucked off the hair of his head and the beard on his face and then sat down “astounded” (i.e. stunned or devastated) until the hour for the evening sacrifice. **(9:3)**

The people who knew God's Word no doubt began to tremble **(9:4)** no doubt, in fear of what the Lord might do again to this feeble nation.

*Isaiah 66:2 ...but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, **and trembleth at my word.***

Ezra's prayer of confession can be compared with the one Daniel prayed **(Daniel 9)** and the one that we will see Nehemiah pray in **(Nehemiah 9)**.

There in **9:6**, Ezra prays these words: *"O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God!"*

He looks back to Israel's past sins **(9:7)**, and admits that the nation deserved captivity. But now the Lord had sent deliverance, they had been restored by His grace, and yet the nation was sinning again.

The future of the kingdom was now hanging in the balances because of sin—that's how feeble the restored remnant of Israel was!

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God had extended mercy to them and graciously answered their prayers and given them favor before heathen kings and had allowed them to build the house of God again! **(9:9)**

What more could Ezra say? In so many words he says, *"We have not learned our lessons, for God has punished us for our sins, yet we go on sinning still!"*

It is interesting to note that Daniel, Ezra, and Nehemiah all had to confess national sin and plead for forgiveness! No doubt they were applying the passage of Scripture in *2 Chronicles 7:14 If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.*

However, it was not enough for just a religious leader to pray; the entire nation had to face its sins and make matters right with the Lord!

THE CLEANSING OF THE NATION - CHAPTER 10

When we get to the Book of Nehemiah Chapters 8-13, we'll see a parallel account of religious revival in Jerusalem.

God answered Ezra's prayer by touching and convicting the hearts of the people. **(10:1-5)**

Some of the men came to him openly and confessed that they had married heathen wives and disobeyed the Law of the Lord.

They offered to make a covenant with God and to put away their unclean wives.

A great revival could come to ANY local Church today if all of those who belong to that local Church, from the leaders right on down to the membership, would humble themselves before God and honestly confess their sins and the sins of their Churches, and all the people would get back to obeying the Word of God!

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The result was a proclamation throughout the land, calling the people to gather in Jerusalem to settle this important matter. *(10:6-7)*

Whoever was guilty and did not come to the meeting would forfeit his place in the land. *(10:8)*

It was on Dec. 20, 457 B.C. when the great multitude assembled in spite of the terrible rain that usually fell at that season. *(10:9)* But the people trembled not only for the rain, but because of their fear of the Lord!

Ezra presented the ultimatum to the people: *(10:10-11)* confess your sins and separate yourselves from the people of the land and from your strange wives! This is confession and repentance, and both must go together.

The people agreed to obey, but they admitted the problem was too widespread and complicated to be settled in a day. *(10:12-13)*

The people suggested that the rulers, elders, and judges straighten out their houses first *(10:14)*, and then, having made matters right, assist Ezra in the work of purging the nation of sin.

10:15 tells us that only four men “*were employed*” which means they “*stood up against*” this suggestion; the rest of the leaders approved it.

We cannot always expect 100% cooperation, especially in matters of discipline.

Note now **verses 16-17**. It took from December to April to clean up the nation.

Vss. 18-44 indicate that 17 priests, 10 Levites, and 86 other men were found guilty of marrying heathen wives. Just because others are doing it doesn't make it right! And just because some leaders are doing it doesn't make it right!

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Also, it was frightening to find priests deliberately disobeying God; for when the spiritual leaders are backslidden, what can you expect of the common people?

So thorough was the investigation, that even the children born from these wrong relationships were exposed and they were expelled with their mothers! **(Vs 44)**

Of course, we realize that the Jewish husbands and fathers made provision for the welfare of these expelled people; but they were no longer to live with them under the same roof as husband and father!

How long did this reformation last? Well, we'll find that about 25 years later, Nehemiah faced the same problem! (Nehemiah 13:23ff)

It was a repeated sin and required repeated discipline. God's servants must “*watch and pray*” if the work of God is to prosper!

To rebuild the temple without reforming the people would have been folly!

It was easier to rebuild the temple than it was to bring the sinful nation back to God!